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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 006469

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SUBJECT: LEFTIST PRISONERS' RIGHTS GROUP OVERRUNS ANKARA AP
OFFICE

1.(SBU) Summary: Far-left prisoners' rights group TAYAD raided Associated Press's Ankara office on November 20, in order to bring media exposure to the GOT's increasing use of modern "F-type" prisons (prisons with 1-3 person cells, vice the older communal wards) since 2000. The group hung banners and shouted slogans to bring attention to an issue that has lost the media and public's attention. Although no one was harmed when the police raided the office and detained the protesters, the incident shows the drastic measures such marginalized groups will take to promote their cause. The GOT is likely to apply a strong punishment to deter future demonstrations. At AP's request, the Embassy has offered to share information on preventive security measure AP can take to counteract further such incidents. End summary.

Activists Seize AP's Ankara Office

2.(SBU) At 10 a.m. on November 20, three "sweet old people" came to AP's Ankara office and requested to speak to an AP representative, according to AP's Ankara Office Chief Suzan Fraser. Once the doors were opened, Fraser told us, 29 members of the far left prisoners' rights group Association for Inmates' Families' Solidarity (TAYAD) entered and said they wanted to protest against the use of F-type prisons heard.

3.(SBU) During the next hour, the TAYAD members held Fraser and three other employees captive, while they unfurled banners from the fourth-floor office that read "No to Solitary Confinement" and "122 People Died in F-type Prisons", and chanted slogans through a megaphone. Human Rights Association President Yusuf Alatas arrived at the office shortly after the occupation. Alatas told us that an AP employee called him and asked for his help in ending the protest without violence.

4.(SBU) As Turkish Police surrounded the office building, Alatas unsuccessfully tried to convince the TAYAD members to end the occupation. Alatas told us that he called the police and asked that they "not use force." He explained that the TAYAD members did not have weapons and were not threatening anyone. Fraser and Alatas told us that once TAYAD believed a police operation was imminent, they took

AP employees, Alatas, and computer equipment into a back room.

5.(SBU) At approximately 11 a.m., Turkish police fired tear gas into the office, broke down the doors, and detained the 29 protesters. Neither Alatas nor the AP employees were harmed. Although Alatas claimed that the police beat the protesters as they took them into custody, a police spokesperson denied any beating occurred.

EU's Praise of F-Type Prisons Marginalizes Opposition
Groups

6.(U) TAYAD has protested the use of F-type prisons, where convicts are held in one to three-person cells, since the GOT introduced them in 2000 to replace the old system of large, crowded wards where prisoners lived communally. According to TAYAD, other prisoners' rights groups, and individual prisoners who have staged hunger strikes in protest against F-type prisons, the arrangement allegedly leaves inmates socially isolated and renders them more vulnerable to mistreatment from prison guards. The GOT states that the old ward system was at the core of frequent riots and hostage taking incidents, and allowed ultra-leftist inmates to coordinate activities.

7.(SBU) The EU has stated that the introduction of F-type prisons was an important advance for prison reform in Turkey. Dr. Shane Bryans, the EU Council's long-term resident expert advisor on Turkish prisons told us that the EU commends the creation of smaller living units for prisoners as a critical component in a new system that is

ANKARA 00006469 002 OF 002

closer to EU standards. Bryans believes that the violent protests that occurred when F-type prisons were introduced were due to a misunderstanding of modern prison management techniques.

18. (U) As the EU and prison experts praised GOT advances in prison management, and the public learned about the security and human rights benefits of F-type prisons, Bryans told us, protests dwindled and media interest waned. The TAYAD members told Fraser that they wanted television coverage of their November 20 protest against the GOT's use of F-type prisons because the media had been censoring the issue. During the occupation, the group told Fraser they did not single out AP for any particular reason, stating, "We thought about going to Reuters but we heard they didn't have an office in Ankara."

19. (SBU) Comment: TAYAD's occupation of the Ankara AP office shows the group's frustration with the difficulty of keeping the F-type prison controversy in the public view. Given the EU's position that F-type prisons are a vast improvement over older-model prisons, TAYAD's stunt is unlikely to breathe new life into its position. Although this incident did not involve weapons or lead to injuries, the GOT is likely to apply a strong punishment to deter future desperate acts of a similar nature. At Fraser's request, the Embassy has offered share information on preventive security measures AP can take to counteract further such incidents. End comment.

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